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Beauxlieux Diamonds

By Mrs. HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD.

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CHAPTER III—CONTINUED.

The days were long to the duchess while her son and the monsieur were away. She busied herself and Victorine at their embroidery, at their books. She walked beside the sea in the latter part of the day, a slight, swift figure wrapped in a long cloak, looking over the gray and melancholy waste, restless herself as those dreamy waters were—longing for her boy, distrusting and fearing the future, yet soothed when she thought of the strong arm of M. Etienne, on which, whether near or far, she leaned. In the evening Pierre tinkered at the barrel of the music box, having a knack of tinkering, or perhaps Jean read to them by the firelight which illuminated the dark salon, he lying on the skin beside the hearth, whose logs he and Pierre had helped to

She Walked Beside the Sea in the Later Part of the Day.

bring in from the forest, or reading, not by any means the news of the day—madame would have none of that now—more frequently old romances of derring-doe.

When Beauxlieux came home with the story of his adventures it was Pierre's eyes that opened at the mention of palaces and great houses, and he demanded even more particulars than had struck Beauxlieux's sight. It was Jean who asked about the people upholding the structure of the great households on their shoulders. Jean himself had been away on foot, more than once now—no one knew where. But even the duchess had seen the light on his face sometimes when coming back.

"I shall have a dwelling such as one of those," said Pierre. "I shall house my wife in a palace. I go to Paris to make my fortune."

"You like then this rotten splendor," cried the deep voice of Beauxlieux, from the shadow where he sat by the duchess on the other side of the wide hearth. "Alas! It is only the scum on a sea of filth and iniquity. That laughter of the people who float over it—I hear through it only the groan of the people who produce it."

"I shall not search too deeply," said Pierre. "One man cannot reform the world. Let me take the best of it while it is going—money, jewels, houses, horses—"

"And you call that the best? Money wrung out of my sweat? Idle glitter of jewels while others have scarcely rags? Houses that are gilded seraglios, while there are men and women sleeping on wattles of straw"—

"It will not be my fault," said Pierre, "that they sleep on straw. Pshaw! When I am rich I shall not keep it all to myself. I shall take pleasure in giving—"

"He has read of Alnaschar," said Jean.

"In giving!" cried Beaulieux. "There is no giving! It is theirs! It is their labor, their lives, their deprivation, their want, their suffering, that made all this money; no matter how you come by it. It is theirs! You can give them nothing. You can only restore in part."

"What puzzles me," said Jean, "is how these others can think that they love the good God, and, knowing that He loves all men, be willing to wrong any man. No, no, when I recollect the story of Jesus, that He died for men, I have felt myself unwilling to accept the sacrifice. I have felt that I, too, must surrender myself, if not to die, then to live for men. Never for myself, only for them."

"Oh, Jean!" cried Beaulieux, clasping his hand. "And I shall live with you!"

"I suppose Jean is going to be a priest?" said the pretty Victorine, with a little insolent shrug.

"Not of any church, Victorine," said Jean. "I shall not need to be blessed of the apostolic succession in order to carry hope into dungeons."

"Oh, you make me cold at the heart of me!" cried Victorine.

Beaulieux had now set himself seriously at work to learn the profession in which M. Etienne was so accomplished. He was not one under any circumstances to be idle. His mother had not wished this study, however, she would have him wait, even if it were in poverty, preserving his nobility, till the government should give him his own again. But the hated empire had fallen, and it had been replaced by the even more hated republic. That had not signified greatly to her; it was never "France" to her. It was always "My son." But now even Henry V. was dead. "There is no more hope," M. Etienne had declared. "Let his grace do as he will." And it was M. Etienne who found the means for Beaulieux to go to Paris and finish his undertaking. His mother had some dim idea that all things were open to him as his father's son, as the last of his exalted name; she had no idea whatever that the name now was remembered only as a matter of history, nor that in Paris the young duke was known simply as Beaulieux, a student of promise from a southwestern department.

It was on his twenty-first birthday that his mother formally made over to him his possessions. He was a little sad about it—not that the chateau was a ruin, the forest so thin, the fields so few and bare, but that his mother should break her heart over these affairs. For himself, he was full of strength and hope, and nothing mattered since he was well and was alive, since he had M. Etienne and Jean; since, above all he had his mother.

His mother, not yet in her fortieth year, was still beautiful, her hair black as the raven's wing, her dark clear skin as smooth as a girl's, her eyes glowing as the midnight stars, her smile heartwarming. As she stood in the warm light, for Olympe had candles in every sconce, wearing that pale primrose satin of more than twenty years ago, covered now with black lace of a far greater age, almost wrapped in the glow of the Beauxlieux diamonds, as in a cloud of brightness, preserving all the sweet and stately grace of her first youth, she was still a sight to make a man's heart tremble. She seemed to beam and sparkle as she walked, her every movement shedding a stream of light; and Jean himself did not find it possible to envy her in his heart that night the possession of the diamonds, that they might be sold and their price given to the poor. As for her, it would as soon have occurred to her to sell herself as those stones, which were a part of the insignia of the family magnificence.

She put off the air of gentle melancholy which she usually wore, but which was a remnant of old manner rather than an indication of present feeling, and made them gay with her gayety. She talked with Jean of Beauxlieux, her son, and his future, with M. Etienne of his great cases, with Pierre of his hopes—Pierre had had a year in Paris now. She danced with Beauxlieux to tunes of the music box. She even danced down the long room with M. Etienne, once, but no more, a sort of shiver making her fall on the cushsions of the bench in the big window there, and she closed the evening by singing at the piano, which Jean kept in tune, a little chanson, that was as proper to her voice as fragrance is to the rose. When she embraced her son, and bade them all good-night, and swept through the door that M. Etienne held open for her, they felt as if after all in her grace and majesty there were the traits of a divine right to power, that something like a superior being had been with them.

And later, as she sat under Olympe's hands, the pretty Victorine taking the jewels as they were unclasped, the duchess thought, with a sort of sacred joy, of the time when she should give these jewels to Beauxlieux' wife—an Orleans princess, it might be; who knew? That family had the wealth required, but the Sarazines Beauxlieux name and blood was the older and the nobler. And she smiled unconsciously and sweetly on the girl whose forwardness had of late needed repression, and had made the duchess doubt her wisdom in taking the three low-born children into her life, through pity for Beauxlieux' solitude at a time when the safety of what was left to them lay in being forgotten. And taking from her jewel box a thread of gold holding

And Swept Through the Door.

a heart of pearls, she hung it on the girl's neck, so that no one might fail of happiness on the day that Beauxlieux, even though it were but fanciful vision, with no tangible reality, came to his rights as the first peer of France.

CHAPTER IV.

Beauxlieux was walking late that night on the stone terrace flooded with moonlight. On one side the sea, not far away, swelled like the curve of some silver shield and cast its own luster back upon the sky and filled the night with the soft music of its murmur. On the other side he saw the old chateau, covered with vines, full of deep-set shadows.

"Voyez vous pendre au flanc de la colline
Ces murs, ces tours, cette vaste ruine?"

he repeated as he walked.

"Aux temps passes une bruyante cour
Retentissait douce ce muet sejour,
Il fut pouple de heroes et de belles,
Il ontendt aux nobles demoiselles,
Les chevaliers chanter des lois d'amour."

And just then he saw two shadows hurrying down the arcade of the long disused chapel cloister, disused, since, when she had reorganized her household on the basis of comparative poverty, the duchess had suffered the abbe to go, accepting in his stead the office of the village priest. "Ah, well," Beauxlieux said, a gentle smile following the shadows, "the love of the noble demoiselle and the chevalier, is no better worth than the love of Pierre and Victorine. And this may help to strike the balance with all that other, the loves, the luxury of that bruyante cour. Can it take less than the life time of centuries of Beauxlieux to restore to the people all of which that bruyante cour, and such as that, has robbed them?"

For he had already another point of view than that of his mother, who, believing it the duty of nobles to hold their people in charge and provide for their happiness, was confident that the Beauxlieux could never have done otherwise. And he went back to his thoughts, which were now full of somber feeling and now of joyous hope.

While at his studies in Paris Beauxlieux had penetrated the hidden side of life; he had seen sights that made him shudder again as he spoke of them to Jean. And in recalling these journeys with M. Etienne as far as the Caucasus, he forgot the palaces, the galeries, the lovely women, the stupendous fortifications, the grim soldiery, all he had seen, except the squalor, the crime, the poverty. He was going back to Paris now to finish his medical studies; he would write every day to Jean, he would see Pierre frequently enough—but Pierre's outlook on life was already totally at variance with his and Jean's. Moreover, Pierre meant to be a money maker; and their contention was to destroy money. "It is the first evil," he said, as he walked, looking across the lawn, that long ago had been filled in where once the moat gathered its waters, and, into the edge of the overgrown park, where a hare bounded across the open space. And suddenly something smote his vision like a blaze of glory and was gone again, shining, shapeless, a moonbeam cleaving the foam wreath of a cascade, an apparition of glittering mist, a white ghost of the old magnificences come back to look upon the scene with him. For a

"And It Was We Who Made Them So."

moment the thought flashed on him that it was some masquerading play of Victorine's, and then it had vanished so instantly, that he knew it for an illusion of his eyes, of his brain, tired with thinking and caring and sorrowing for sorrows he could not heal. And so he left the night and moonlight, and the cold unquiet sea, and went to his slumbers.

There had been a brief season of gayety in the first year after Beauxlieux's majority, when Pierre, who reported himself as doing finely, came home to marry Victorine, whose hand he had asked of the duchess, a wedding which took a great load off the mind of Olympe, since she knew the wiles of Victorine, and the charm of being Duchess des Sarazines Beauxlieux, even in a republic, where it might be little more than being a duchess of rag fair. She had not chanced to hear Pierre say to Victorine that night in the wood: "I will make you Duchess des Beauxlieux yet!"

More than once in the two years time, Beaulieux had run down to the chateau for a sight of his mother, for a fresh drip with Jean, no one knew where, but from which he came back with an air, one could not declare were it more of sadness or of proud determination. "I have been eating black bread," he would say in answer to his mother's inquiry. "I have been among my brothers. There is so much to do. They have not only to be helped, they have first to be taught that they need the help. They are in the dark; they do not even grope; they do not know that there is any light. They suffer so. They are so patient. Some of them, my mother, seem like beasts of the field. And it is we who have made them so!" he cried, springing to his feet. "It is the weight of our splendor that has crushed them into earth."

"Our splendor!" said his mother, bitterly.

"The splendor," with a wild gesture, "that, thank God, is ours no more!"

"My child! Beaulieux!"

"Sometimes," he said, "when I am with them, my heart swells as if it would burst. I feel the very singing of the poor blood in their veins. It would not be so poor had mine not been too rich! We have trodden them down so long, they have been so herded, so outraged, so cowed, so starved, their souls impoverished as their bodies—my God! We have lived on their labor, our wealth is their sweat, our thrones are planted on their slaughter! Often when I have seen the great carriages driven along the Bois, the high stepping horses in their golden harnesses, the women, rosy, round, their silks overflowing like petals of great flowers, the sight of them has made me tremble, I have felt the wheels of those carriages rolling through blood!"

(To Be Continued.)